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ABSTRACT

This practicum was designed to improve reading comprehension of intermediate grade children attending compensatory education classes in a Florida elementary school. It involved 11 students in grades 2 through 5 who were low achievers in reading and/or math. It was designed to improve reading comprehension by providing training using six specific strategies and techniques: (1) reducing student anxiety, (2) finding causal relationships, (3) cuing students with specific directions, (4) rereading material, (5) summarizing material, and (6) using advance organizers. Specific goals were to improve students' knowledge of reading strategies, their attitudes toward reading, their self-perceived ability in reading, and their grades in reading comprehension. To determine the success of the program, evaluative instruments were administered at the beginning and end of the study measuring knowledge of strategies, use of strategies, comprehension, attitude and self-perception. Analysis of the data revealed that students improved their reading comprehension and their attitude toward reading. Gains were made by students for each objective that was measured. Appendixes provide a teacher interview questionnaire, student attitude questionnaire, strategies test, sample test passage, and students' perception survey. (NH)

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PRACTICUM REPORT

Improving Reading Comprehension of Intermediate Grade Children

by

Leah B. Nachman

Center for the
Advancement of Education
Ed.D. Program

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NOVA UNIVERSITY

Improving Reading Comprehension of Intermediate Grade Children

by

Leah B. Nachman

Cluster XXII

A Practicum (I) Report Presented to the Ed.D. Program
in Early and Middle Childhood
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

NOVA UNIVERSITY

1987

PRACTICUM APPROVAL SHEET

This practicum took place as described.

Verifier: Ernest M. Roberts

Ernest M. Roberts

Principal

Sunrise, Florida

5/29/87

Date

This practicum report was submitted by Leah B. Nachman under the direction of the adviser listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood and approved in parial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova University.

6/15/87

Date of Final Approval of Report

V.K. Kumar, Ph. D., Adviser

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Leah B. Nachman

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ABSTRACT

Improving Reading Comprehension of Intermediate Grade Children. Nachman, Leah B., 1987: Practicum Report, Nova University, Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood. Descriptors: Reading Comprehension/Reading Processes/Critical Reading/Reading Strategies/ Reading Skills/Comprehension Skills/Comprehension Activities.

This practicum was designed to improve reading comprehension of intermediate grade children by providing training using six specific strategies and techniques.

The writer selected the following six strategies based on a review of the literature: (a) reducing student anxiety, (b) finding causal relationships, (c) cuing students with specific directions, (d) rereading material, (e) summarizing material, and (f) using advance organizers. To evaluate the success of the program, the following instruments were administered at the beginning and at the end of the program: a test for knowledge of selected strategies: a survey for student use of strategies, a selected comprehension test passage, a student attitude questionnaire, and a student self-perception survey; by providing training to children to use six specific strategies. Specific goals were to improve student's knowledge of reading strategies, their attitudes toward reading, their self-perceived ability in reading, and their grades in reading comprehension.

The results of this practicum were positive. Analysis of the data revealed that students improved their reading comprehension and their attitude toward reading. Gains were made by students for each objective that was measured.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Description of Community

The setting in which this practicum was done is an elementary school serving children in grades kindergarten through five. Approximately 750 students attend this elementary school which is located in the southeast portion of the state some 20 miles away from a popular vacation beach resort. While tourism is the major industry for this area, it has little direct effect on the community in which the school is located.

The school itself is located in a community which has a middle class socio-economic status. The student body is 97% Caucasian, with 3% composed of Black and Hispanic students. Parents of the students at this school are working class people requiring both parents to work inorder to maintain their homes. The area is comprised of single family three and four bedroom homes. Inspite of the two parent working families, parents are very active in volunteer programs and the Parent Teacher Organization at school.

Academically this school ranked fourth in the school district based on standardized test results. Parents, teachers, administrators and students are goal oriented and competitive in securing academic honors. Programs at the school are geared to improving the

quality of education and the students' abilities to produce high achievement.

The students involved in this practicum attended compensatory education classes in grades 2 through 5. These students were the school's lowest achievers in reading and/or math. Admittance to the program was based on standardized test scores determined by the state. Often these students have been previously retained by the school district. The regular classroom teachers recommended that these students receive additional instruction to improve their reading and math skills. Occasionally, these students were classified as disruptive or disinterested in the regular classroom setting and were recommended for compensatory education where classes are smaller and instruction is more individualized. Compensatory education is a developmental program to teach reading and math skills on a daily basis for 30 minutes each day.

Author's Work Setting and Role

The writer's role is the compensatory education teacher for students in grades 2 through 5 for the curriculum areas of reading and math. She has 12 years of teaching experience at the elementary school level. Her educational background is a Masters Degree in Early Childhood

Education with a special curriculum in reading. Based on this background the writer was given the position of compensatory education teacher and began a developmental reading program. Her responsibilities included the assessment of the specific needs of students for the purpose of developing strategies for a sequential instructional program. In addition to assessment, she administers standardized tests to identify new students for the purpose of entering the program.

The major responsibilities of the compensatory education teacher are the daily 30 minute instruction period for the purpose of teaching skills, techniques and strategies that lead to improvement in reading. Materials used are varied and different than those used in the regular classroom setting. Emphasis is placed on manipulative and game type approaches. Encouragement is given to students through various incentives to increase motivation. A major goal is to promote interest in reading at a level that will not produce frustration. Students meet with success and are enthusiastic about coming to this program.

CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Problem Description

The problem concerns 11 students in grades 4 and 5 enrolled in compensatory education classes whose reading comprehension levels were 6 to 12 months below their grade level. These students did not grasp the major concepts in the material they read, which caused difficulty in assignments requiring discussion of main ideas. Often, they did not use the information they read to make logical predictions or draw conclusions about the material. They were unable to answer questions correctly during classroom discussions about the assigned reading, and the result was that these students received low grades on reading assignments which required comprehension. These students received low grades on tests that required reading and these low grades often carried over into other curriculum areas, such as social studies and science, which also required skill in comprehension.

It appears that these students had developed reading difficulties in their previous grades and continued to receive poor grades on assignments requiring comprehension, especially as the material became more difficult. The regular classroom teachers reviewed reading comprehension skills using their present grade level material, however, this material was more difficult than

these students could successfully comprehend. Therefore, the situation became more pronounced for these students because their foundation in comprehension skills was weak. They lacked adequate skills and techniques to use inorder to comprehend what they read.

The inability of these students to successfully read materials on their grade level was a difficulty encountered often. This caused low grades on homework, tests and report cards. Retention for some of these students was a possibility, if they had not already been retained. All of the above produced low motivaion to do assignments requiring reading and sometimes disruptive behavior in the classroom. Many of these students felt inadequate because they were unable to read as well as their classmates. Their standardized test scores were the lowest in the school causing embarrassment to their parents and themselves. The problem has affected them during school hours with their reading assignments, but it also has caused difficulty in the home. Concerned parents tried to find the solution to the problem and expected their children to do additional work to improve their grades. This usually caused friction between the parent and student because extra work did not eliminate the problem. Extra work became a burden to the student who was unaware of the appropriate srategies and techniques to use to improve reading

comprehension.

Classroom teachers were affected by this problem because they had to find alternative teaching techniques and materials to help these low achievers. Large classes made special attention to these students difficult for classroom teachers, who wanted to help their students attain necessary skills for reading comprehension. It was these students and their test scores which caused the classroom teacher extra work and embarrassment when class test scores were posted.

The reasons why this problem had not been solved previously are numerous. Prior to this school year the students in compensatory education were instructed by an aide with no special qualifications for teaching reading. Regular classroom teachers focused on reading skills required by the curriculum rather than techniques and strategies to learn particular skills that improve comprehension. These students seemed to require more time and individual attention than they received in the regular classroom setting, which was provided in the compensatory education class. Classroom teachers were unaware of specific strategies and techniques to use with low achievers in reading because the curriculum and reading text used are geared to the child capable of average and above average achievement. Often, reading comprehension

was viewed as a separate curriculum area and not included in content area lessons with specific time given to techniques and skills for the purpose of understanding this material.

It was clear that the problem was these students did not use the appropriate techniques and strategies to comprehend the material they read.

Problem Documentation

To prove the problem of reading comprehension existed the regular classroom teachers were interviewed about their students' comprehension abilities. All 8 teachers reported their students reading below grade level and recommended they receive help in comprehension. Students were required to do homework involving reading but the quality of work was rated poor for all but one student. Teachers stated they had not observed these students reading during free time in class. They stated that these students did not volunteer during reading lessons, but called on them periodically to check their comprehension with questions. (See Appendix A for Teacher Questionnaire.)

Students involved in this practicum were required to master 90% of the minimum basic skills. The minimum basic skills are 28 skills in reading that the school district requires each student master inorder to be promoted to the next grade. The skills of 11 students

included in this practicum, were collected from tests administered by the regular classroom teachers at the end of the previous school year. The actual tests were sent from the district office.

The results of the minimum basic skills tests showed that 1 student had mastery of 50% of the skills, 2 had 60%, 5 had 70%, 2 had 80%, and 1 had 86%. Thus all 11 students were below the 90% mastery level standard set by the school district and faced possible retention. These data support teacher's observations that these students have severe reading problems.

Student scores on the I.T.B.S., Iowa Test of Basic Skills were administered in the spring by the school district. This standardized test measured reading vocabulary, reading comprehension and gave percentiles for the total reading battery. To be placed in the compensatory education class these students scored at or below the 12 percentile in either part or the total reading battery. The students included in this problem solving experience had a range of scores from 1 student in the fourth percentile and 3 at the 12th percentile. The other students had their scores scattered in between. The school's average score in reading on the I.T.B.S. for grade four was the 93rd percentile and for grade five the 95th percentile, which

showed a large deficit for the students who attended the compensatory education class.

Finally, an evaluation of report card grades of these students provided additional evidence of reading problems, 1 received an F, 10 received D, and 1 received a C. The one student who received a C was performing at an acceptable level in reading which was surprising in view of his standardized test score. Discussion with the classroom teacher indicated that student was repeating fifth grade and thus reviewing the material taught last year. With the possible exception of this one student there was clear documentation that these students were in need of additional instruction.

The information cited above documented that these students needed to learn appropriate strategies and techniques to improve reading comprehension. In all five areas discussed the indication is that these students were poor readers and did not comprehend what they read. There was a need to implement a program to improve comprehension for these students.

Causative Analysis

One cause for students' poor reading comprehension is their own anxiety. Often students became anxious because they were aware that their work would be graded. This explained why some students had better grades on

classroom assignments than tests. Anxiety is an "internal distraction making it difficult for some students to attend to the appropriate educational tasks" (Ross, 1977, p. 168). It was evident that student anxiety did affect performance and must be controlled by the individual student.

At times, students do not comprehend the material they read because they are not cued to read for the purpose of comprehension. Many students needed a reminder, or cue, to read for a specific purpose. This could help them maintain a focus on the material they must comprehend. Research shows that lack of a simple cue may lead to daydreaming or the need for repeated reading (O'Shea, Sindelar, & O'Shea, 1985). Further evidence shows that in addition to lack of cues to comprehension in general, specific cues for desired responses are not given. This causes students to read without concentrating on necessary details in the material, leading to poor recall and minimal comprehension.

Another cause of poor comprehension is unawareness and/or inability to perceive causal relationships in the material they read. Students do not use the stated facts nor do they look for cause and effect relationships in stated facts. Processing separate pieces of information led to incomplete comprehension. The lack

of techniques for finding the relevant concepts and their connection directly affected the comprehension of the student and his/her level of achievement (Levin, 1986, p. 11).

Students do not take the time to reread assigned material to gather additional information about what they have read. Many times obvious information is overlooked because the students give the materials only one reading. Students who try to skim or scan the selected passage have difficulty in thoroughly understanding the material presented (Cheek & Cheek, 1983, p. 94). This is a significant cause of poor comprehension when reading is done in other curriculum areas in which more technical information is included.

Upon completion of a reading assignment, students do not take the time to think about what they've read and summarize the major points. This is a leading cause for difficulty in comprehending material. Students often recall separate facts from their reading but do not organize them into a simple summary in preparation for an assignment or test. The process of making a summary could help to eliminate poor reading comprehension. Schubert and Torgerson (1978) stated that "without the use of summaries basic comprehension factors such as author's purpose, central ideas, and main points can

often be overlooked" (p. 173).

The final cause of poor reading comprehension, for the purpose of this practicum, is that students are not given advance organizers prior to their reading of the assigned material. Advance organizers have a strong effect on the way students read a particular assignment. Students without a clear purpose for the assignment understand less material than when they are instructed with an advance organizer. The anticipation of a specific question or purpose for reading allows students to execute the assignment differently. Reading instruction for the purpose of comprehension should include the use of advance organizers on a daily basis (Turner & Fey, 1977, p. 41). The limited use of advance organizers in regular classrooms is a major cause for student difficulty with reading comprehension.

It is the writer's observation that these causes are also operative in the present practicum site, and a program to remove them should improve reading comprehension of students.

The Related Literature

The need to improve reading comprehension can be found in every book or journal published on education. As students are asked to compete against others and test scores are published in newspapers, the educational

system tries to improve reading comprehension. The International Reading Association stated that we must "seek the means of applying significant research results to improve school reading practice" (Manning, 1985, p. 133). Not only must the school system encourage students to read, but programs must give the students the necessary tools to understand, process and use what they are reading (Paris & Jacobs, 1984).

To understand the need for comprehension a closer look at the definition of reading is necessary. It is a process of decoding words for the purpose of gaining meaning from the symbols on the printed page (Spache & Spache, 1977). If students cannot gain meaning from material they read then their skill is incomplete. Reading without comprehension is a serious deficit for the student, and becomes a greater problem in adulthood. Reading and the ability to comprehend what is read is considered one of the most important tasks a student learns inorder to become a self-sufficient human being in modern society. The process of reading is used hundreds of times each day for the purpose of: learning about world events, ordering food from a menu, or shopping in a grocery store. Comprehension is needed to make choices that are logical (Page & Pinell, 1979).

A report by Anderson, Hiebert, Scott and Wilkenson

(1985) on Becoming a Nation of Readers concluded that the entire country must take as its goal to make worthwhile improvements in reading. It suggested several objectives to include in such a program emphasizing the importance of teaching students flexible strategies for the purpose of comprehending texts in every curriculum area. Anderson, et al. hoped that each school system engage in a problem-solving experience to implement programs to give students the skills necessary to become independent readers.

Several techniques and strategies can and have been used, one such strategy is the use of advance organizers by McFeely (1984) in a research project with elementary school students. His findings showed that students who were asked to read for specific purposes and then asked questions that used critical thinking skills showed higher scores on comprehension type activities.

Hahn (1985) suggested that students be taught to ask questions of themselves during reading. He stated that this stimulated thinking along with the use of immediate corrective feedback. This study was done with middle grade children by training students to use three types of questions. The results showed success was highest with sixth grade students and Hahn suggested the results were encouraging.

Summarizing leads to improved comprehension because it promotes rigorous thinking about basic factors such as the author's purpose, central ideas, and main points (Schubert & Torgerson, 1978). Practice in summarizing leads to better writing skills, and develops general language ability all of which benefit the student by improving the reading ability and comprehension. Like summarizing, rereading is a technique used by too few students to aid their comprehension. Often the answers to simple questions are overlooked because the student did not reread assigned material. To encourage rereading of mateial and thus, improve comprehension "positive experiences with reading within the classroom must be developed" (Quandt & Selznick, 1984. p. 4). Reading centers with interesting material at various grade levels is of major importance in promoting an interest in reading. Early student success will develop a life long habit of reading.

Baumann and Schmitt (1986) stated that improved reading comprehension will occur when students understand the importance of the reading skill. Four steps were used to explain the skill of main idea to students. Results were not stated but Baumann and Schmitt concluded that their method was a plan for instruction of reading comprehension skills worth using in the classroom.

Student anxiety, whether real or imagined affects student performance. The anxiety may be changed by several techniques using relaxation and systematic desensitization. It is important to note that anxiety is created internally yet students must be trained to control it (Schickedanz, Schickedanz, & Forsyth, 1982). Although this strategy by itself will not improve comprehension an anxiety free student is more likely to absorb skills and strategies taught. It has been shown that when the threat of a grade has been removed students can often produce better results on reading assignments. While this is not entirely possible in our educational system, reducing anxiety in students prior to situations where grades or scores will be given is most helpful (Lapp & Flood, 1978).

Auditory background during reading was reported about by Mullikin and Henk (1985). Their population of intermediate grade children were exposed to three types of background music while their comprehension levels were measured. Results showed that the type of backgorund music or the lack of music produced differences in student performance on reading comprehension tasks. The highest scores were obtained by students exposed to classical music, rather than rock music or no music at all.

Varhagen and Goldman (1986) used the strategy of developing causal relationships to improve reading comprehension. They used four instructional activities through various type questions to promote the students' abilities to find causal relationships in material read. Their results showed it was an effective technique for improving comprehension and students memory. The pre and posttest assessment showed students gained 50% in recall.

A study by Zenker and Frey (1985) used the strategy of relaxation techniques to reduce student anxiety and improve comprehension of prose. The authors used daily tapes to instruct students in relaxation methods prior to the actual instruction. Assignments followed the tape each day for a period of 10 days. The results showed students increased their level of comprehension and their enthusiasm for school tasks. With reduced anxiety their ability to attend increased and they felt they were more successful as students.

The cloze technique was the strategy used by Reutzel (1986) to improve reading comprehension. This study was done with fifth grade students inorder to develop thinking skills leading to improved comprehension. The technique used was to include questions to stimulate thought and discussion in the text margin. This

developed higher comprehension and improved thinking skills for students.

The technique of cuing students to the purpose of reading discussed by O'Shea et al (1985) shows that it will improve reading comprehension. They used two groups for the purpose of their study and cued one group for the purpose of comprehension and the other group for accuracy in their reading. Their research showed that comprehension improved from 7 to 11% when cued to comprehension compared to the control group which was not cued for comprehension.

Advance organizers used as a specific strategy to improve comprehension are successful because they direct students to focus their attention on the assigned material. Cognitive processing begins prior to reading because the advance organizers sets the pace for the student to begin analyzing the task. Winne and Marx (1982) suggested that use of advance organizers start three cognitive processes "comparing, generating, and reexamining as a result of instructional stimuli" (p. 507). They further stated that the type of organizer or cue will orient students to use these processes separately or in sequence. It was suggested that the most significant finding was for teachers to use advance organizers prior to instruction to stimulate, orient, guide, and involve students in

the lesson to be presented (Winne & Marx, 1982).

Comprehension is the goal of reading and sometimes requires that material be read more than once. In content areas which may provide information which is highly factual, the technique of rereading is extremely important.

Hennings (1982) stated that next to instruction of vocabularly, rereading material in content areas was most critical. Students must be made aware that rereading a paragraph or entire page of material assigned will require more time initially but provide background information leading to easier completion of assignments. This strategy for comprehension is closely tied to motivation. Students who have low reading comprehension scores may lack the motivation to read material a second or third time. The teacher becomes crucial in using techniques and incentives to encourage students to use the strategy of repeated reading. This may be done by developing a positive self-concept in the student and his reading ability (Quandt & Selznick, 1984).

Additional literature suggested student learning styles affect their level of comprehension. Often, it is important to match a student's style of learning with the presentation of material. This includes finding the most effective techniques, using them in combination

Chapter III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Statement of General Goals

The major goal projected for this practicum was the improvement of reading comprehension of students in grades 4 and 5 in the compensatory education classes. Additional goals were to improve:(a) students' attitude toward reading, and (b) students' self-perceived ability in reading.

Behavioral Expectations

Over the 10 weeks of this practicum students in the compensatory education classes were expected to:

1. Improve their knowledge of reading strategies as measured by attaining a higher mean score on a teacher made strategies test of knowledge given at the end, relative to the beginning, of the implementation period.
2. Raise their reading comprehension grades by at least one letter grade on selected test passages given at the end, relative to the beginning, of the implementation period.
3. Report a higher mean number of strategies actually used while reading selected test passages at the end, relative to the beginning, of the implementation period.
4. Report a more positive attitude toward reading by attaining a higher mean score on a teacher made attitude inventory given at the end, relative to the beginning, of the implementation period.

with new strategies and using the knowledge that the student has internalized to promote the most successful environment for learning (Levin, 1986).

Another strategy for improving reading comprehension discussed by Schubert and Torgerson (1978) was to teach context clues so children would infer text meaning inspite of unfamiliar words. Reading ahead by students to decode an unfamiliar word is helpful and should not be avoided. They stated that phonic analysis of every word that children do not know causes a breakdown in comprehension and the interest. Students should be encouraged to continue reading to gain meaning inspite of unfamiliar words. Practice in using context clues promotes guessing using known facts in the mateial and aids comprehension.

In conclusion, knowledge of child development and the idea from the literature cited above showed the need for a program to improve reading comprehension. The literature presented similar problems in similar settings with results that were positive. Methodology used appeared to be similar and adaptable to the educational setting in this practicum.

5. Report an improvement in their own perceived reading ability as measured by attaining a higher mean score on a teacher made reading ability self-perception questionnaire given at the end, relative to the beginning, of the implementation period.

Evaluation Instruments

The evaluation tools used were:

1. A pre-test and post-test for knowledge of selected strategies and techniques taught to students. This instrument was selected to determine whether students understood the concept of each specific strategy or technique prior to training. The test on selected strategies consisted of 10 multiple choice questions requiring students understand their basic definitions. (See Appendix C - Strategies Test.)

2. A survey administered before and after training to determine the extent to which students actually use the strategies taught while reading test passages. The purpose of this instrument was to determine if students would incorporate the strategies taught into their reading routine. This survey was administered to each student individually after reading a test passage. Students were asked to name the strategies they used to complete the reading of their test passage.

3. Comparisons of reading comprehension scores on

selected test passages will be done both prior to and after training with selected strategies and techniques. This evaluation tool was selected to check for an increased number of questions answered correctly following training. Sample test passages were on a fourth grade reading level followed by six questions requiring use of skills taught. The questions were the multiple choice type. (See Appendix D - Sample Test Passage).

4. Comparison of pre and post responses on student attitude questionnaire. The purpose was to determine if a positive relationship would develop in students' attitude toward reading following training in selected strategies. The student attitude questionnaire consisted of 10 questions using a Likert type scale for responses. (See Appendix B - Student Attitude Questionnaire).

5. A pre and post self-reported measure of students' self-perceived ability. This measure was selected because students' self-perceived ability may be related positively to improved academic success. Students were asked four questions using a Likert type scale to determine how students evaluate their success with reading. (See Appendix E - Students' Perception Survey).

Chapter IV

SOLUTION STRATEGY

Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions

One strategy found in the majority of recent literature concluded that improving comprehension requires deriving meaning from the passage through use of causal relationships and rewriting or rephrasing the essential ideas (Eagan, 1982). The study done by Eagan (1982) showed sixth grade students improved reading scores through activities requiring the matching of events and causes. Originally the procedure was simple using stated causes and then used implied causes for particular events. Approached as a guessing game the students caught on quickly leading to gains in comprehension.

Finding causal relationships in events from selected reading passages was a recommended solution in a great number of research articles, Phelps (1983) and Paris and Jacobs (1984) worked with students in grades 3 through 6 to develop comprehension skills using the strategy of finding causal relationships. Their findings supported the use of this as an instructional technique to increase comprehension levels. As the use of this technique has produced positive results, it was decided to include it as one of the strategies in the present practicum.

To cue students to the task of reading comprehension with specific directions and questions is a basic technique used for improving the comprehension of students at the elementary school level. Kurth and Stromberg (1982) suggested that the teaching strategy that showed improvement in comprehension in grades 2, 3, and 4 in the briefest period of time was cuing students to the task by specific directions or questions. This increased the independent reading level in a minimal amount of time. As Kurth and Stromberg employed students similar to those used in the present practicum, this strategy was considered appropriate for use in the present practicum.

Reducing anxiety to improve reading was shown to improve reading comprehension in as little as 10 days (Zenker & Frey, 1985). The use of a simple tape recording prior to instruction was one method to promote relaxation. This was used to encourage self-regulation by students in various school situations (Tierney, 1982).

A related technique may be to play soothing instrumental music during the time students are reading. This could easily be accomplished by pre-recording music from an easy listening radio station. This strategy would be most effective when used on days where students would be asked to demonstrate their comprehension by reading various test passages. Mullikin and Henk (1985) stated auditory background directly influenced reading

comprehension because reading is an interactive process.

Another solution selected, rereading material two or three times to gain additional information to improve understanding, was supported in the literature. O'Shea, Sindelar, & O'Shea (1985) and Samuels (1979) stated repeated readings facilitated reading accuracy and comprehension. The results of their research with third grade students showed that comprehension scores increased with each additional reading of material in one to three readings. Rereading is a practical and a simple method to use, especially with the students involved in the present practicum. It was therefore selected as one of the solution strategies.

The use of summarizing material was a technique to develop comprehension, improve memory and focus attention on major concepts in a reading passage. Ribovich (1977) and Durr (1977) discussed the use of both oral and written summaries as a teaching strategy to improve comprehension. In addition to raising the level of comprehension Ribovich stated "it stimulates concept development and improves the students organization ability" (p. 11). Additional studies cited the use of summaries led to improved reading in content areas (Cheek & Cheek, 1983).

The last solution discussed is the use of advance

organizers. This technique was very common among many classroom teachers as a tool to focus the attention of the students. For the average child this was helpful and to the low achieving child this may become a necessity. Spiegel and Fitzgerald (1986) used advance organizers with fourth grade students by comparing it to the story's setting. The purpose was to use the advance organizer to look for specific story parts. The method of instruction used showed these children outscored those who did not receive the training.

In summary, the following six strategies seemed most appropriate for use in the present practicum: (a) reducing anxiety, (b) finding causal relationships, (c) rereading material, (d) summarizing, (e) cuing, and (f) advance organizers.

Description and Justification of Solution Selected

The selection of strategies for improving reading comprehension was based upon primarily two considerations: (a) they should be developmentally appropriate, and (b) there should be some experimental support for their effectiveness.

According to Piaget children are capable of different levels of intelligence at various stages. Students in the intermediate grades are between the ages of 9 and 11

years. Piaget called this the concrete-operational period. During this period a child can think logically about concrete situations (Fischer & Lazerson, 1984). Thus, these students should have no difficulty learning the techniques used in the present practicum. Additional support for their appropriateness can be found in curriculum guides for fourth and fifth grades where some of these skills are taught and later tested by end-of-book tests. The district has a comprehensive guide including similar strategies to be taught and evaluated.

The use of the combination of these six strategies seem justified because they have been the most frequently cited in the literature as effective. Most studies have employed one strategy, but the present practicum implements six strategies. There is experimental support for the effectiveness of each of these strategies in raising elementary student's comprehension levels. It was felt that the use of multiple strategies was justified to produce cumulative increases in comprehension.

Report of Action Taken

The steps taken to implement the strategies began by administering a pre-test to each student to assess their level of comprehension on selected reading passages. The passage was selected on the students' grade

level from supplemental reading materials. Reading passages were from "Reading for Comprehension: The Continental Press, Grade 4, Book 3." (See Appendix D - Sample Test Passage.) Additional teacher made tests of reading strategies (See Appendix C) and questionnaires regarding student attitude and student perception were administered (See Appendices B and E). This information was collected and kept in each students individual folder for comparison to post test scores.

The action taken to present the strategy of reducing student anxiety began with a discussion of the term anxiety. Both dictionary and teacher explanations were provided. The technique of slow and deep breathing was demonstrated and then practiced by all students. Students were asked to discuss their feelings following the breathing exercise. Other methods to reduce anxiety were discussed. The following day students were presented with a five minute tape to promote relaxation. An activity on what types of situations produce stress was discussed. Students were questioned to determine their specific understanding of the term anxiety. Students practiced techniques such as: deep breathing, closing their eyes, and counting to ten to reduce their anxiety and promote relaxation on a daily basis. Prior to reading

test passages from Drawing Conclusions, Frank Schaffer Publication, students were encouraged to use an anxiety reducing technique of their choice. Daily practice time was provided prior to any class assignments. The completion of training using this strategy allowed students to share their individual methods or specific messages used to reduce their own anxiety. Review and practice of this technique was encouraged periodically and specifically during review periods.

Cuing students was implemented by a verbal instruction to read carefully. When students were finished a discussion about how they read their assignment followed. Students were asked if they felt they read differently than if they were told to read pages assigned. The definition and concept of cuing was discussed. Students were given brief passages from The Game Drawer, Reading Comprehension Skills Game, Draw 3, with verbal instructions stating oral questions would be asked. Initially passages were brief. Students were asked to discuss their feelings about how they read the passage. Cues became more specific to help the students locate specific information, such as; main idea, following directions, or making inferences. Materials for practice included: Scoring High in Reading, and Reading for Comprehension Series; Getting the Main Idea. Training developed to use written cues on the

chalkboard to develop students independent reading skills. Students were cued daily either verbally or with written cues. Discussion and encouragement was provided to have students use this technique for assignments in other classes.

Prior to introducing a third strategy a review for the techniques to reduce anxiety and the use of cues was given. Each strategy was discussed briefly and students were encouraged to tell positive experiences in which the strategies were used. Students were given worksheets and told to demonstrate their individual techniques to reduce stress, and a written cue was provided to encourage students to complete the assigned material carefully.

Training for use of causal relationships began with a discussion of giving sample events and asking for possible causes. When students were able to grasp this skill the definition and purpose for causal relationships were discussed. A cause and effect card game called Can Do, by Ideal was played to encourage students to match events and their causes. The following day simple sentences were read and each student had to determine which was the cause and which was the effect. Students were given paragraphs to read and were asked orally to discuss the causal relationship. Additional paragraphs

from Teaching Strategies were used and students had to underline the implied causes for the stated events. The culminating activity was using the game Mountain Climb in which students must be able to find the cause and effect stated in the paragraph to reach the mountain top and win the game.

The strategy of rereading began by discussing the prefix re-and the definition of rereading. Student feelings about rereading were discussed and reasons for rereading were explained. Practice began by asking students to reread sentences and then answer questions. Score charts were kept to prove to students more answers were correct when they read the sentence more than once. Students were reassured that additional time would be given for them to read material again. Brief paragraphs were given to students to read followed by six questions. Students read the paragraph once, answered questions, and turned in their papers. Students were asked to repeat the same assignment and reread the paragraph once, or twice if necessary. Students were then asked to compare the number of questions answered correctly on the single reading and the multiple reading. The material used for this strategy became more difficult each time to emphasize the necessity of rereading material. Questions were verbal and written on the various

selections. Discussion was done daily to develop student awareness to the benefit of rereading. Materials used to develop the strategy of rereading, included: Reading in the Middle Grades, Barnel Loft: Getting the Main Idea and Locating the Answer.

At this point a review was conducted of the four strategies that were taught. Students were encouraged to explain the meaning of each strategy and how they had used it in their regular classroom situation or at home. Practice was provided using the Reading Comprehension Series and students were observed for use of techniques to reduce anxiety, self-cue prior to reading, and the number of times students reread material assigned. Students were asked individually if they looked for causal relationships to help their understanding of passages read.

The technique of using summaries was introduced by eliciting from students the definition of a summary. Students were questioned about the purpose of a summary. When students understood a summary was shorter than the original passages, sentences were used to give practice at summarizing. This was done orally and compared to telling the major points. Paragraphs on charts were displayed and students verbally summarized the main points. This was followed by students summarizing entire

stories such as: Cinderella, Pinnochio and Peter Pan. This clarified the concept of a summary as a short form because each student knew the major points of the above fairy tales. The final practice for the strategy of using summaries was a written summary of material read. Students were asked to select a library book of interest and submit a written summary of what they had read during one class period. This strategy later developed into a book report assignment with addditional directions following the completion of actual strategy training.

The use of advance organizers was introduced by informing students they must read the selection and questions will follow. Students were asked how they would approach reading the material and stated this was similar to our work on using cues. After discussing the purpose of advance organizers it was concluded there were differences in the two strategies, and the use of advance organizers would give them practice with reading skills. Activities for practice of advance organizers were asking questions prior to reading assigned material. Questions varied from simple to open-ended. Some questions required reading to find a fact, locate information, or explain a concept. Additional activities included materials from: The Game Drawer, Barnel Loft Comprehension

Series and Readers Digest Skill Builders. Advance organizers were reviewed to explain to students its use as a tool prior to reading to set the goal of why they read.

A review of the six selected strategies was conducted using games: Drawing Conclusions Bingo, Mountain Climb, and Hidden Treasure. Prior to beginning each game students were asked to demonstrate, define, or explain the strategies taught and how they could use them prior to and during their turn in each game. A final practice was given by having students read a test passage and answer six questions. Discussion of the answers and number of techniques used followed. Students were reminded and encouraged to use the strategies whenever possible.

Upon completion of the instruction of all six strategies the post test for comprehension was administered. The strategies test, student attitude questionnaire, and student perception survey were also administered. This data was collected inorder to present my findings and analyze the results of this practicum.

Chapter V

RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

Results

Objective 1: Improvement in Knowledge of Reading Strategies

A one-tailed *t* test for correlated groups was used to determine if post-test scores were significantly higher than pretest scores at the .05 level of significance. The results were as follows: pretest $M = 5.36$, $SD = 1.20$: post-test $M = 7.54$, $SD = 1.63$: $t(10) = 4.87$, $p < .05$.

These results showed that the difference between the mean scores of the pre and the post-test scores is statistically significant when measuring knowledge of reading strategies.

Objective 2: Reading Comprehension Grades

One of the objectives for the practicum was to raise students reading comprehension grades by at least one letter grade on selected passages. Student scores were calculated for two separate passages and the results are as follows: 1 student received the same grade on the selected test passage given at the end relative to the beginning, 6 students raised their grades by one letter grade on the selected test passage given at the end relative to the beginning, and 4 students raised their grades by two letter grades in reading comprehension on a selected test passage given at the end, relative to the beginning

of the implementation period. Thus, 10 of the 11 students in this practicum showed improved reading comprehension by one letter grade or more. Grades in reading comprehension ranged from a low of D for 2 students to a high of A for 1 student.

Objective 3: Mean Strategies Used During Reading

A one-tailed *t*-test for correlated groups was used to determine if post-test scores for the objective of mean number of strategies used while reading selected test passages were significantly higher than pretest socres at the .05 level of significance. The results were as follows: pretest $M = 2.27$, $SD = .26$, post-test $M = 3.36$, $SD = .36$, $t(10) = 3.47$, $p < .05$.

These results show that the obtained value is higher, as predicted, than the tabled *t*-value, therefore, the difference between the mean scores of the two groups is statistically significant. Students used more reading strategies following training. These figures were calculated based on students' report of the reading strategies used during the reading of a test passage and observation by the author.

Objective 4: Attitude Toward Reading

A one-tailed *t*-test for correlated groups was used to determine if post-test scores were significantly

higher than pretest scores at the .05 level of significance. The results were as follows: pretest M = 18.9, SD = 3.78, postest M = 23.63, SD = 4.71, t (10) = 2.43, $p < .05$.

These results showed that the difference between the mean scores of the pre and the post-test scores is statistically significant when measuring student attitude toward reading.

Objective 5: Self-perceived Reading Ability

A one-tailed t test for correlated groups was used to determine if the post-test scores were significantly higher than pretest scores at the .05 level of significance. The results were as follows: pretest M = 10.63, SD = 1.63, post-test M = 11.72, SD = 1.35, t (10) = 2.95, $p < .05$.

These results showed that the difference between the mean scores of the pre and the post-test scores is statistically significant when measuring students' self-perceived reading ability.

In summary, the results of this practicum showed that the reading comprehension of intermediate grade children improved. The use of the selected strategies and techniques during the implementation period produced

positive results for each objective stated. The significance of the results were measured by t-tests for 4 of the 5 stated objectives. The fifth objective showed positive results by a comparison of grades prior to implementation and relative to the end of training period. The overall findings show that the students in grades 4 and 5 in the compensatory education classes improved their reading comprehension, their attitude toward reading, and their self-perceived ability in reading.

Conclusions

From the results of this practicum, it can be concluded that students in the compensatory education classes in grades 4 and 5 improved their knowledge of the selected reading strategies taught by attaining a higher mean score on a teacher made strategies test. It can be inferred that the training of the selected srategies and techniques produced these results.

It can be concluded that students used a higher mean number of strategies while reading selected test passages from the results stated earlier. This confirmed the expectation that following the implementation period students would use the selected

strategies and techniques as a result of the treatment during the 10 weeks of this practicum.

An additional conclusion can be made that students did raise their reading comprehension grades by at least one letter grade on selected test passages from the stated results. This was expected because students were now trained to use key strategies and techniques for the purpose of improving their reading comprehension.

The results of the teacher made attitude inventory scores lead to the conclusion that students did report a more positive attitude toward reading following the implementation period. It was expected that student attitude would improve following training due to student success with reading comprehension.

The conclusion can be made that students improved their own perceived reading ability as a result of the training of the selected strategies. Studies (e.g. Quandt & Selznick, 1984) have shown that students' self-perception of reading ability is related to their level of achievement. It is possible that improvement in comprehension helped improve their self-perception and vice-versa in the present practicum.

The general conclusion can be made that students in the compensatory education classes in grades 4 and 5 did improve their reading comprehension, their attitude

toward reading, and their self-perceived ability in reading. For the purpose of this practicum it can be stated that the objectives were met. The essential features of this practicum were the use of the six selected strategies used for training and class size. It is important to note that the selected strategies were those most commonly found in recent literature for the improvement of reading comprehension, yet no study used a combination of these six strategies, although several prior studies had stressed that greater achievement could be facilitated using additional strategies in various combinations. One factor that played an important role in producing positive results in the present practicum is the number of students involved were very small so that each student received individual attention. There is current literature which shows class size produces significant results in achievement when less than 15 students are in a class (Wagner, 1981). A conclusion is stated throughout the literature which suggests positive experiences and self-concepts must be developed to promote success with reading (Quandt & Selznick, 1984). The results of the present practicum suggest the value of the six strategies employed in promoting not only their success in reading, but improving their own perceptions of reading ability. This may have long-term motivational

benefits. Hence, the time necessary to implement such a program is warranted to promote positive changes for students.

The limitation of this practicum was that no random sampling procedures were used. Students in this practicum were assigned by the school administration. This reduced the external validity of the practicum and generalizability is limited to students in grade 4 and 5 in small classes.

Recommendations

The recommendations for other programs similar to this one are:

1. Use a variety of manipulative type materials to provide motivation to the students to participate.

2. Present classroom teachers with a list of selected strategies to coordinate possible follow-up in the classroom and with homework assignments.

3. Communicate with parents the importance of the program and make specific suggestions to them on how they can reinforce the strategies at home.

4. Develop an incentive program for students to encourage regular attendance to classes.

Dissemination

The plans for disseminating the results of this practicum are:

1. Share the results with the regular classroom teachers for the students involved.

2. Share the results at a faculty meeting to encourage similar programs in other classes where students need to improve reading comprehension.

3. Submit a copy to the Directory of Compensatory Education for future reference.

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APPENDIX A

TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Appendix A

Teacher Interview Questionnaire

1. What is the student's present reading level in the MacMillan basal reader?

2. Which area of reading comprehension is the student's weakest? (i.e. main idea, finding details, drawing conclusions, etc.)

3. Does the student do required homework which involves reading? Briefly describe the quality of the work done.

4. Does the student choose to read during free time in the classroom?

5. Does the student avoid participating (volunteering) in activities that require reading?

6. Is the student aware of his/her problem in reading? What behaviors suggest they are aware of this problem?

Please feel free to add any additional information that you feel is pertinent about this student.

APPENDIX B

STUDENT ATTITUDE QUESTIONNAIRE

Appendix B

Student Attitude Questionnaire

Directions: Circle one response for each question.

1. Do you like to read?

(a) A lot (b) Somewhat (c) Not so Much (d) Not at All

2. Is there any type of book you like to read (e.g. animal books, mysteries, biographies)?

3. Would you rather read than play during free time?

(a) Always (b) Most of the Time (c) Sometimes (d) Never

4. Do you like reading classes?

(a) A lot (b) Somewhat (c) Not So Much (d) Not at All

5. Is reading your best subject?

(a) Surely (b) Somewhat (c) Not so Much (d) Not at All

6. Do you like to read magazines and newspapers?

(a) A lot (b) Somewhat (c) Not So Much (d) Not at All

7. Do you prefer reading assignments to other school subject assignments?

(a) Surely (b) Somewhat (c) Not so Much (d) Not at All

8. Do you read more than 15 minutes at home each day?

(a) Always (b) Most of the Time (c) Sometimes (d) Never

9. Do you go to the public library on a weekly basis?

(a) Always (b) Most of the Time (c) Sometimes (d) Never

10. Do you like to read before you go to bed?

(a) Always (b) Most of the Time (c) Sometimes (d) Never

APPENDIX C

STRATEGIES TEST

Appendix C

Strategies Test

Directions: Circle one letter to answer each question:

1. Anxiety may cause the following physical symptoms:
a) sweating b) fast breathing c) both a & b.

2. A summary of a story is usually: a) longer than the story b) shorter than the story c) only one sentence.

3. Rereading your assignment can help you:
a) get out of doing more work b) remember additional information c) impress the teacher.

4. "If it begins to rain come in the house to play," is an example of: a) causal relationship b) advance organizer c) predicate adjective.

5. An advance organizer helps a student: a) find the action verb b) read poetry c) read for a purpose.

6. Use a summary inorder to: a) find the flaws of the hero b) understand the main ideas of a story c) answer questions about the story characters.

7. To reduce anxiety the student must: a) go to the doctor b) avoid situations that are difficult c) control their thoughts.

8. The meaning of the word cue is: a) a prompting device b) the letter before "r" c) a straight line.

9. To reread something means you: a) read it quickly b) read it again c) read only the end.

10. A causal relationship is when: a) the causes are realistic b) the relationship causes trouble c) two events are related.

APPENDIX D

SAMPLE TEST PASSAGE

Appendix D

Sample Test Passage

Do Fish Have Ears?

You might think that a fish's ears are those two curved flaps on the side of its head. These flaps are just about where our ears are placed, but they are not the fish's ears. The two flaps are its gill covers. They protect the gills, which the fish uses to take oxygen from the water. You will not see any ears sticking out even if you look a fish over from head to tail.

The ears that we see on people and animals are called outer ears. Their job is to catch sounds and to send them to the inner ears. The inner ears are safely hidden inside the bones of the head. They do the real work of hearing.

There are good reasons why a fish does not have outer ears. A fish's life depends on swimming. Swimming calls for a streamlined body. Outer ears would slow a fish down. Outer ears on a fish would also fill with water. That could cause earaches.

A fish does have a pair of inner ears. They are inside the bones of its head and are covered with scaly skin. These ears pick up sounds that travel through the water. When you are fishing, you should be quiet. Although we cannot see a fish's ears, they are at work. They will warn the fish if a noisy person is nearby.

Appendix D

Sample Test Passage (continued)

Mark the (O) beside the right answer.

1. Fish can hear. (O)True (O)False

   Outer ears do the real work of hearing. (O)True (O)False

   People have no inner ears. (O)True (O)False

2. Which word in paragraph 4 means tell to be careful?

   (O)pair (O)pick (O)warn (O)hear

3. The main idea of the article is that _____.

   (O)sounds travel through water (O)fish use gills to breathe (O)fish have inner ears but no outer ears

4. Which paragraph tells about gill covers?

   (O)1 (O)2 (O)3 (O)4

5. INNER is to OUTER as noisy is to _____. Think how the first two words go together. Then mark the word that goes with noisy in the same way.

   (O)ears (O)quiet (O)sounds (O)hear

6. We can decide from reading the article that inner ears are inside the head for _____.

   (O)protection (O)warmth (O)better looks

APPENDIX E

STUDENTS PERCEPTION SURVEY

Appendix E

Students Perception Survey

Directions: Circle one of the choices.

1. Are you a good reader?

(a) Very Good (b) Good (c) Poor (d) Very Poor.

2. Do you think you can improve your reading grade?

(a) Very Surely (b) Surely (c) Not so surely (d) Not at All.

3. Do you think your classmates see you as a good reader?

(a) Almost all of them (b) Most of Them (c) Some of Them

(d) None of Them.

4. Do you think your parents see you as a good reader?

(a) Very Good (b) Good (c) Poor (d) Very Poor.